

Eisenberg, William D.

HAVE BULLET, WILL TRAVEL.

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Have Bullet, Will

A courageous young lady and her remarkable dog guide carry a message of hope as they inspire Lions Clubs and other groups to support Leader Dog Teams.

By William D. Eisenberg

The tall, stately blonde paused part way across the busy street, puzzled. She could hear the rush hour traffic whizzing past her. "Bullet, forward!" she ordered the handsome German Shepherd at her side. The dog did not budge. "Bullet, forward!" This time the dog moved, and her heart sank into her shoes. He was turning, taking her up the street, against the flow of traffic! Pulse pounding, she followed her canine guide as he threaded his way for what seemed like miles. Then he turned again, and a few steps later she felt the familiar rise of a curb. Only then did Grace Kleinhans relax.

It was not until she arrived at her job at the Philadelphia Bureau of Employment Security the next morning that she learned the reason for Bullet's strange conduct. A repair crew had quit for the day, leaving a yawning excavation in the street, protected by nothing more than wooden planks at waist height. Only Bullet's alert action had saved Grace, practically blind from the age of 11, from a bad fall, serious injury or

even death. It was then that she realized how much she owed the Abington, Pennsylvania, Lions Club, and how much it meant to have a Leader Dog serve as your eyes. "Bullet, I love you," she thought.

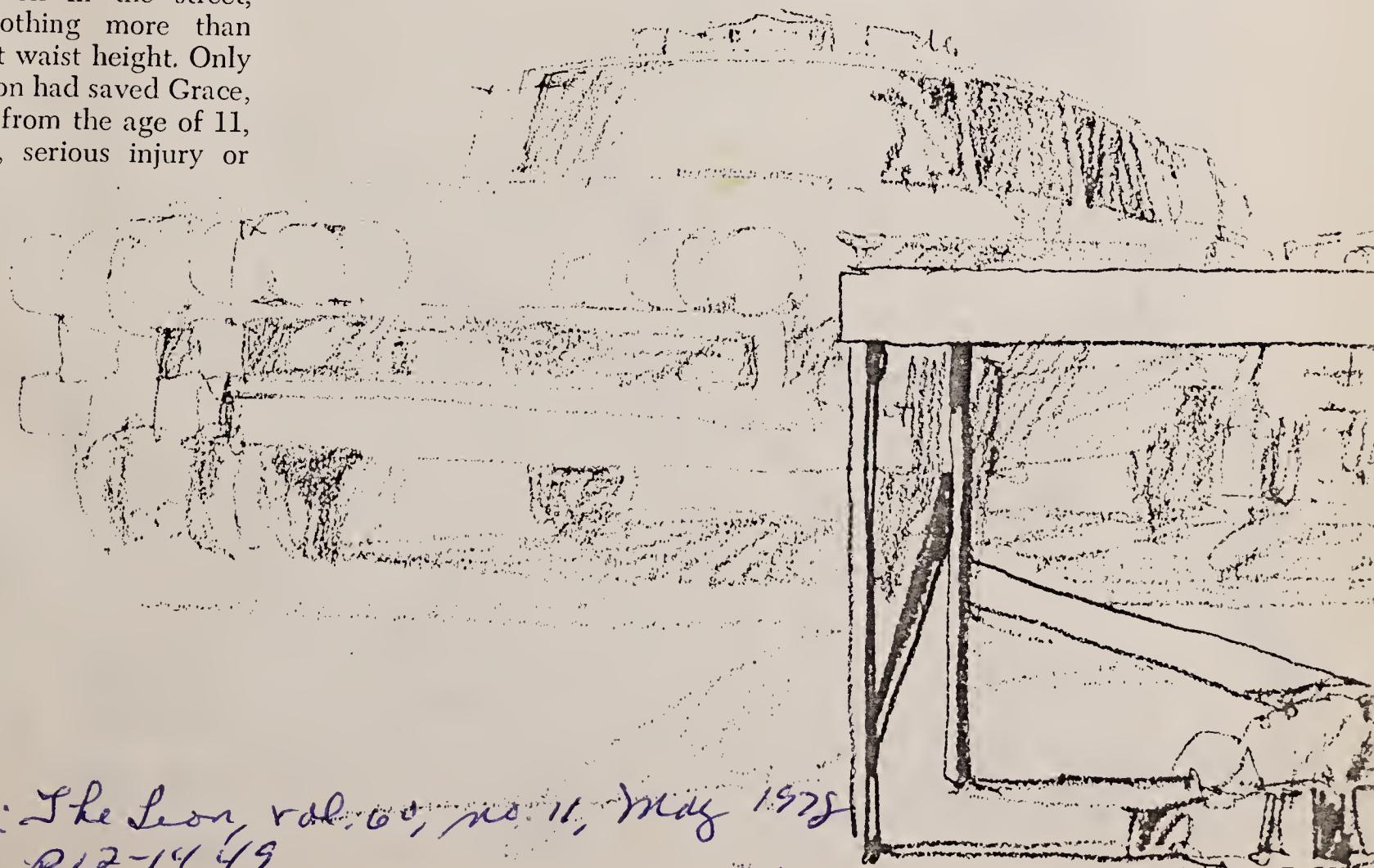
Though she nor anyone else knew it, the stage for these events had been set when Grace was born prematurely at home on December 3, 1945, the retinas of her eyes still not fully developed. Throughout most of her childhood, she enjoyed seemingly near-normal vision, a fact that she says gives her an advantage over people who have been blind from birth.

From time to time during these early years she would have "blurry spells," but they would go away and her sight would improve each time. The first awareness that anything was wrong came when she went to

school and could see the blackboard, but not the writing. She was sent to Philadelphia's school for the physically handicapped, where at age nine she observed the first Braille classes offered by the school and even served as an escort for blind students. Her eyes seemed to be improving, so that now, after a "blurry spell," she no longer needed glasses.

She remembers quite clearly the day she began to lose her sight. It was May 7, 1957. "I was sitting in the schoolyard at recess," she says. "I was sitting in bright sunlight and when I went into the shade, everything went foggy—a blur. When I went inside, the blur was still there. That was the first indication there was a serious problem."

Grace was fast losing her sight. In the fall of 1957, she went right into Braille in the seventh grade.



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Travel

Through courage and hard work, she kept up with her class and maintained a superior average.

When the time came for her to enter high school, she could only distinguish between light and darkness. She was assigned to Philadelphia's Northeast High School, a building designed for 2,400 students, but being used by 4,500. Undeterred by her status as a nearly blind student in a class of 1010, she was one of 18 honor roll students whose work was recognized as distinguished.

Determined not to settle for the ordinary, she chose art as her major, concentrating on sculpture. One of her linoleum block cuts, entered without reference to her near-blindness, won a top award in a citywide contest.

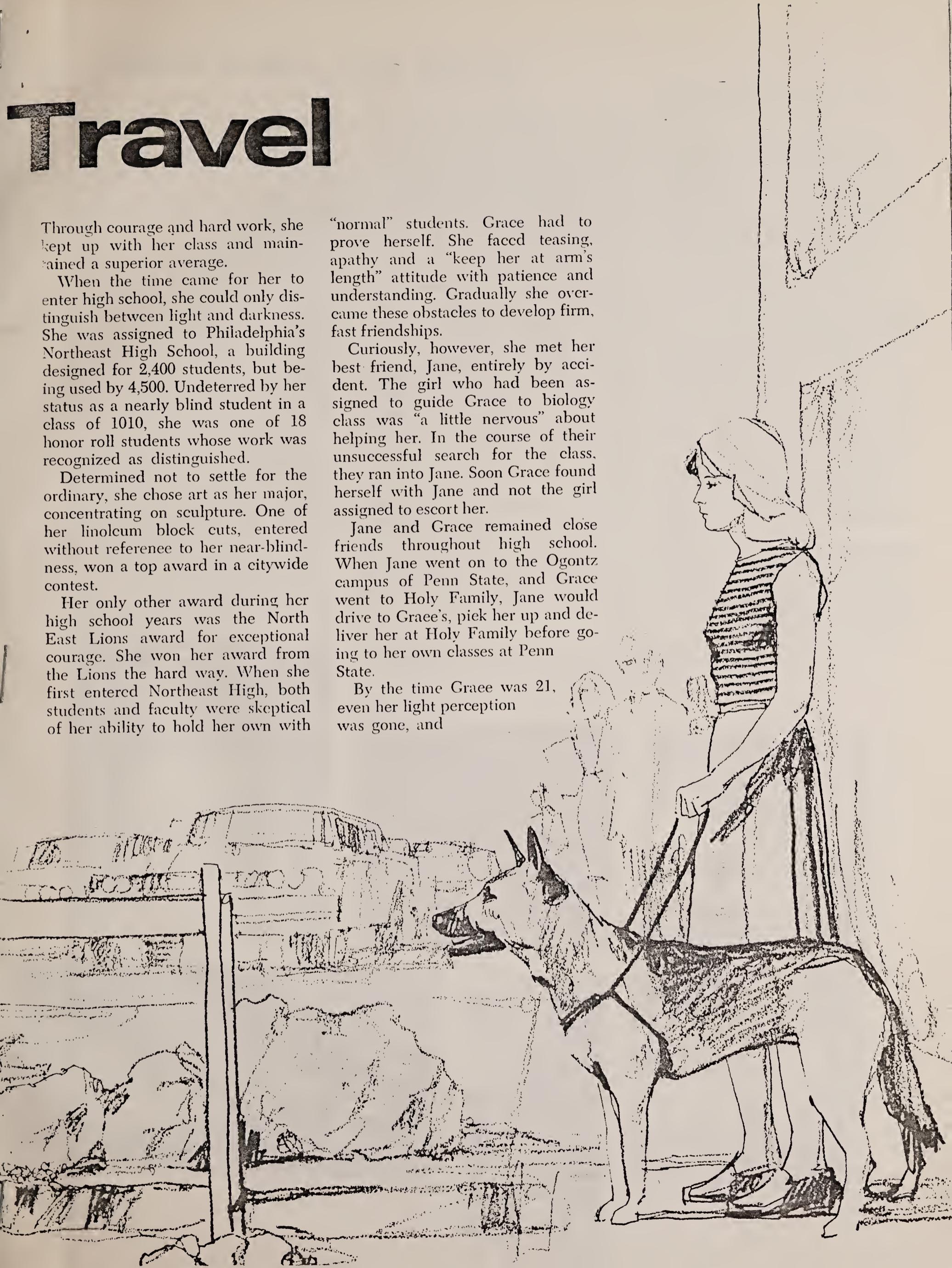
Her only other award during her high school years was the North East Lions award for exceptional courage. She won her award from the Lions the hard way. When she first entered Northeast High, both students and faculty were skeptical of her ability to hold her own with

"normal" students. Grace had to prove herself. She faced teasing, apathy and a "keep her at arm's length" attitude with patience and understanding. Gradually she overcame these obstacles to develop firm, fast friendships.

Curiously, however, she met her best friend, Jane, entirely by accident. The girl who had been assigned to guide Grace to biology class was "a little nervous" about helping her. In the course of their unsuccessful search for the class, they ran into Jane. Soon Grace found herself with Jane and not the girl assigned to escort her.

Jane and Grace remained close friends throughout high school. When Jane went on to the Ogontz campus of Penn State, and Grace went to Holy Family, Jane would drive to Graee's, pick her up and deliver her at Holy Family before going to her own classes at Penn State.

By the time Graee was 21, even her light perception was gone, and





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she became the first blind student to graduate from Holy Family. A local newspaper published a photo of her and her mother, who had been Graee's reader throughout college. The picture was seen by Tony Edelmann, who worked with Graee's father. Tony, who raised German Shepherds, told Grace's father the girl should have a dog.

Grace wasn't sure. She had been led to believe that she would have no help of any kind with a dog guide. She hesitated to be solely responsible for a Leader Dog. She was considering going on to graduate school, but four years had been hard "on Mom and I both."

In February, 1971, thanks to Tony Edelmann, Graee was contacted by Sid Greenwalt of the Abington Lions Club. It was only then, through Sid, that she came to know that the Leader Dog School is supported by the Lions. Sid, an authority on German Shepherds, a show judge and a trainer, was confident that Graee could qualify for a Leader Dog. On

April 18, with the Abington Lions approval, she traveled to Rochester, Michigan, to begin her training.

Training at the Leader Dog School is equally rigid for both dogs and people. Any dog who shies from traffic is washed out of the program. In such a traffic check, a dog is led by a handler to an intersection and given the command, "Forward!" When a dog enters the street, suddenly and without warning, another trainer turns a vehicle in front of the dog at close quarters. If the dog shies or challenges the vehicle, he is automatically dismissed.

One day Grace and her dog, Bullet, were walking down a street on a lovely spring morning. Bullet was watching out for obstacles on the pavement level and for low overhangs, such as awnings and branches. Further down the street she could hear a car speeding up, but of course, she and Bullet weren't at a corner or crossing a street. A little farther on, the car suddenly made a right turn and came up a driveway at her. In

that instant, Bullet spotted the car, stopped, and pushed her back to safety.

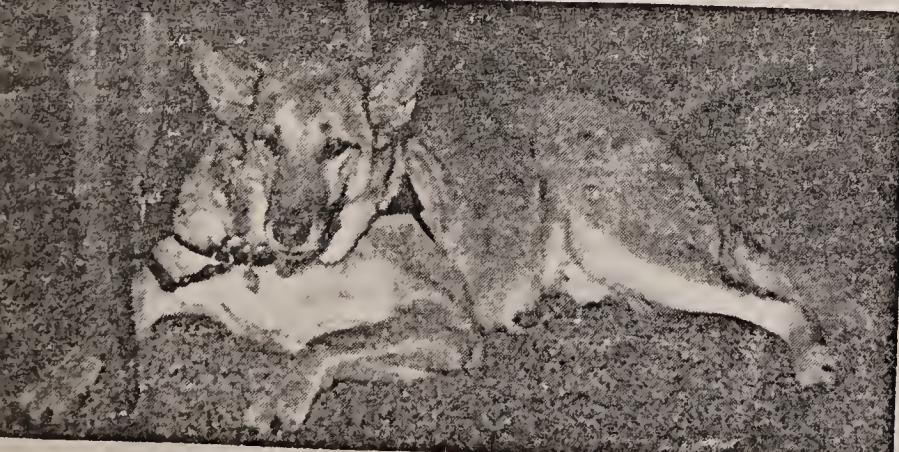
As the car was passing by her to go up the driveway, Graee realized for the first time just how much Leader Dog Bullet was working for her. Until that point, Bullet and Graee had never been challenged as a team. Now she knew that Bullet was not just observing traffic at a corner or while crossing the street, but even while they were going down the sidewalk. Her thoughts were interrupted when the driver stuck his head out the window and laughed, "We got you!" It was her trainer in his own car.

Thanks to the Abington Lions Club, the Leader Dog School and Bullet, Grace was no longer a dependent or a victim. She was now clearly employable, and obtained a job at the Philadelphia Office of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Employment Security.

At first she was a curiosity. Other blind workers had to be escorted. Attempts were made to test her. Her desk was moved three times. Each

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Grace and Bullet are partners. Wherever she travels, the dog will be at her side, guiding and protecting. At Lions Club meetings, they demonstrate how this teamwork helps the blind overcome the barriers to free and easy travel.





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Two members of the Lake Superior Ski Division playfully rope lion costumed Willi Walser, president of the Thunder Bay Lions Club, Ontario, Canada, who presented the Division with a check for \$1,000 on behalf of his club. The Alpine Division is a group of young people 14 to 18 years old who hope to compete in national and international competition. The Lions contribution will help cover expenses for travel and accommodations for the young ski enthusiasts.

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time Bullet found it. That cinched it, in the eyes of her co-workers. Grace didn't need to be escorted—then, or for the rest of the years she remained with the office.

One of the other blind workers was skeptical of Bullet's ability, though he liked the friendly dog. Each morning when she would arrive, Grace would tell Bullet, "Find Dave." Bullet would charge to the rear of the office to greet his "friend." One morning, when Grace gave Bullet the command to "find Dave," Bullet suddenly stopped at a door. It was the door to the men's room, and Grace never gave Bullet the command to find him after that.

In the spring of 1971, Sid Greenwalt invited Grace to give her first talk to the Lions about the Leader Dog School and her life since acquiring Bullet. A few months later, she began to give more talks. She talked at Lions meetings in Districts 14-A and 14-R, at the meetings of other service clubs, for church and women's groups, and even students. Soon these talks evolved into regular trips. People wanted to know about

the Lions' program and the Leader Dog School. The answer came to be, "Ask Grace."

Then, in June, 1973, Mary Pocklington, Assistant Director of the Leader Dog School, asked Grace to go to Baltimore in August of that year to represent the school. In her four years as a volunteer, this was Grace's first out-of-town trip on behalf of the school. She has been making such trips ever since, though now she is a full-fledged field representative of the Leader Dog School.

She has covered all of Pennsylvania, together with parts of New York, Maryland, and even Washington, D.C., where she gave her talk to the Beta Gamma Upsilon Sorority Convention. She speaks to Lions Clubs, civic groups and schools about her adventures and about the Leader Dog School. Her schedule is booked up about a year in advance. She roams as far as Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin and Oklahoma carrying her message of courage and hope, urging people to support the work of the Lions and new Leader Dog teams.

She will go anywhere, or as she puts it, "Have Bullet, will travel!" ■

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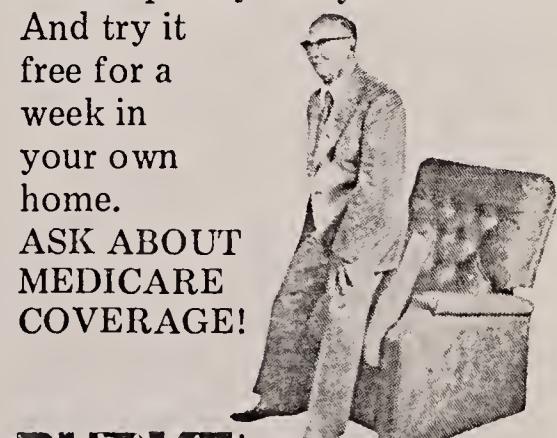
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